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AVALON



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Welcome to the third edition of Missouri Southern's AVALON. Though the publication date of this issue falls a week after Halloween, it is a special tribute to the darkly flavored holiday. Inside are three horror stories of different types that we hope you will enjoy, and some more poetry by students and one enthusiastic assistant professor.

The artwork and photography is appropriate, and getting better all the time. Art submissions have been up lately, and I'm grateful for that.

Instead of the usual gripes about students submitting this month, I thought it appropriate instead to tell you a ghost story of sorts, and talk about its consequences. This time of year, with winter crouching just around the corner, seems the appropriate time to speak about such things as phantoms, sorcery, and things unreal that somehow trickle into our "real" world. Night rolls in quicker these days, before dinner is finished in most houses, making it easier to speak of such things. But don't be fooled. Tricks and Treats don't come exclusively this time of year. Halloween can fall on any day of the year, at any time. It is only the human condition and mind that filters out what it cannot readily explain.

To illustrate, we will share a small "tale," a true story. In cheaply bound paperbacks and tabloids such stories claim that they are *real* and *TRUE!*, but there is no reason to shout from house tops; if you have ever been there, you know. So we will call this little "story"

The Hand.

Last year, in early May, when summer was around the corner and people were thinking of baseball games and walks through greener parks instead of pumpkins grinning on porches and dark shapes gliding past window sills, I was driving home from school, not really thinking of anything.

Seated inside my cluttered car, radio playing a good summer single, I pulled up to the light at 20th street and Main, and stopped for the red.

Traffic moved lazily north and south on Main. Sunlight glinted and bounced off chrome and glass and newly washed cars. Across the street, the old Pemco filling station is boarded up and waiting to be reborn as yet another convenience store with a set of self-service pumps outside.

As the light prepares to change in my favor, the traffic suddenly thins, as if (*later, this bothers me*) to clear the stage of extras in a tiny scene. Still sitting thoughtlessly in my car, I watch as a family-size Chevy enters the intersection traveling south. I can barely remember the driver, but I do remember he looked older, perhaps entering his middle years, and he was smiling in an aimless way that is common in fair weather.

As the car slowed, preparing to turn onto 20th, where my car sat idling, I saw something under the car's frame. Something hung below the chassis, right under the passenger section, where the drive shaft ran. It looked loose and flacid. It looked like a glove, perhaps like one of those yellow Playtex gloves your mother wears so the dishwasher doesn't wrinkle her hands.

Straining to see the glove, still only mildly interested, I shifted in my seat. Time seemed to slow down at this point, to somehow shift down like music played too slow. The shadow of the glove still dangled in silhouette as the car slowed and turned. As the car left Main and pulled past my waiting auto, I suddenly leaned over and craned my head out of my open window, intent on satisfying my hunch.

Hanging limply under the car's hidden inards, swaying and bouncing gently as the car's body settled in the turn, was a small, pink hand. It hung amazingly from below the car, little fingers hanging like a sleeping spider. I remember seeing the pale fingers dip with the car and graze the pavement, flicking them back and forth with a snap. A child's hand.

In popular shocker stories, in horror novels with attractive cover art, people usually summon up a mighty *scream* at such times, often deliciously described.

(*He felt the icy hand grip his heart, and let out a great wailing scream, like a firebell...*)

There was no way I could have uttered a sound. My mind, that balked at images like limbs hanging below moving cars, simply protected itself; it froze solid.

The car, piloted by the older, grinning man, glided past my eyes, still dragging its gruesome prize, and disappeared down 20th.

By now the light had changed in my favor; cars waiting in line behind me began tooting their horns. I started forward, still in that deathly paralysis, until I reached the closed gas station, where I made a violent, and illegal U-turn through the lot and headed back down 20th. To catch that car.

I wanted, *needed*, to catch that car, and yet I didn't. I had to catch that car to insure my sanity, because I was caught in a terrible circle of thought.

Consider: If I looked under the car and the hand was still hanging there, what could I possibly make of it? How could a child fit under that portion of the car's chassis, where there is little or no room. Could a child have been playing and gotten wedged. Somehow trapped? And *drug*?

But what if the hand wasn't there at all? And no doll's plastic arm or limp glove caught in the exhaust pipes? Then was I crazy, seeing horrible visions at random?

Frozen in my seat, I rode up and down the streets all afternoon, and I never found that car. I'm sure I beat it to Rangeline, but it could have turned off anywhere.

In the following days, while my mind still worried about the incident, turning it over and over at night like a dark, secret gem, I had dreams. I would dream of following that car to its house (of course, the man *let me*), and stopping. I get out of my car, cross the moonlit lawn to where the Chevy is parked in the shadows of the run-down, white house of the Grinning Man.

Before I can reach the car and look under it, the Man steps out of the house's shadow and stops me. In the silver moonlight, he is grinning. I want to beg him to let me look under the car, but he only grins in the darkness, eyes twinkling knowingly.

In a personal way, I have come to symbolize the Grinning Man as a icon or dread sentinel of those things we talk about guardedly, secretly. Those things that appear by daylight, in any season. Those things that our minds must silence.

AVALON

Missouri Southern's Student
Literary Magazine

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“Ding, Dong”

By Susan Stone

“Here, Kitty, Kitty. Oh, you’re a pretty kitty. I bet my little girl would love to have you. No, no. Don’t rub on my legs. You’re getting hair all over my hose! Stop it, Cat! Get!”

“Oh, hello. I’m your representative for a new line of cosmetics called. . .”

“Yes, yes. Come in, come in. Hurry up. We don’t want to let my cat in the house. She’s got a bad case of lice.”

“What did you. . .?”

“I was hoping that you would be coming by soon. It seems like young ladies like you are stopping by all the time, but they never come back to take my order.”

“I have several friends over in the old folk’s home and they like to for me to order all their perfumes and shampoos for ‘em. They find it difficult to get out and around on their own and the nurses don’t like pesty salesladies comin’ in. One day I had an order of over \$200, but the saleslady never came back. I hope you’re not like that.”

“Well, I assure you, I am a very respon—”

“Come right on in.”

“Thank you. My name is. . .”

“Make yourself comfortable there on that sofa.”

“Oh, my!”

“Whoops. I guess I forgot to tell you that the springs are gone out of it, Heh, heh. It sorta brings your knees to your chin, don’t it?”

“I’ve been shellin’ peas all mornin’. You ever shell peas before?”

“Well, no. I. . .”

“That’s okay. I’ll show you how. See that little seam there? You just stick your fingernail in it and just pop it right open. Then you run your thumbnail down the insides and those little round buggers will roll right out there. You’ll make a good pea sheller with those long claws. You sure do have them painted up real pretty. Just be careful you don’t break one of them things off in my peas. I’d sure hate to choke on one of ‘em. Here, you can do this bushel.”

“You don’t mind Martin bein’ in your bag?”

“You mean my sample bag?”

“Martin, you’d better get out of there. You might squash somethin’. Now, go on. Get!”

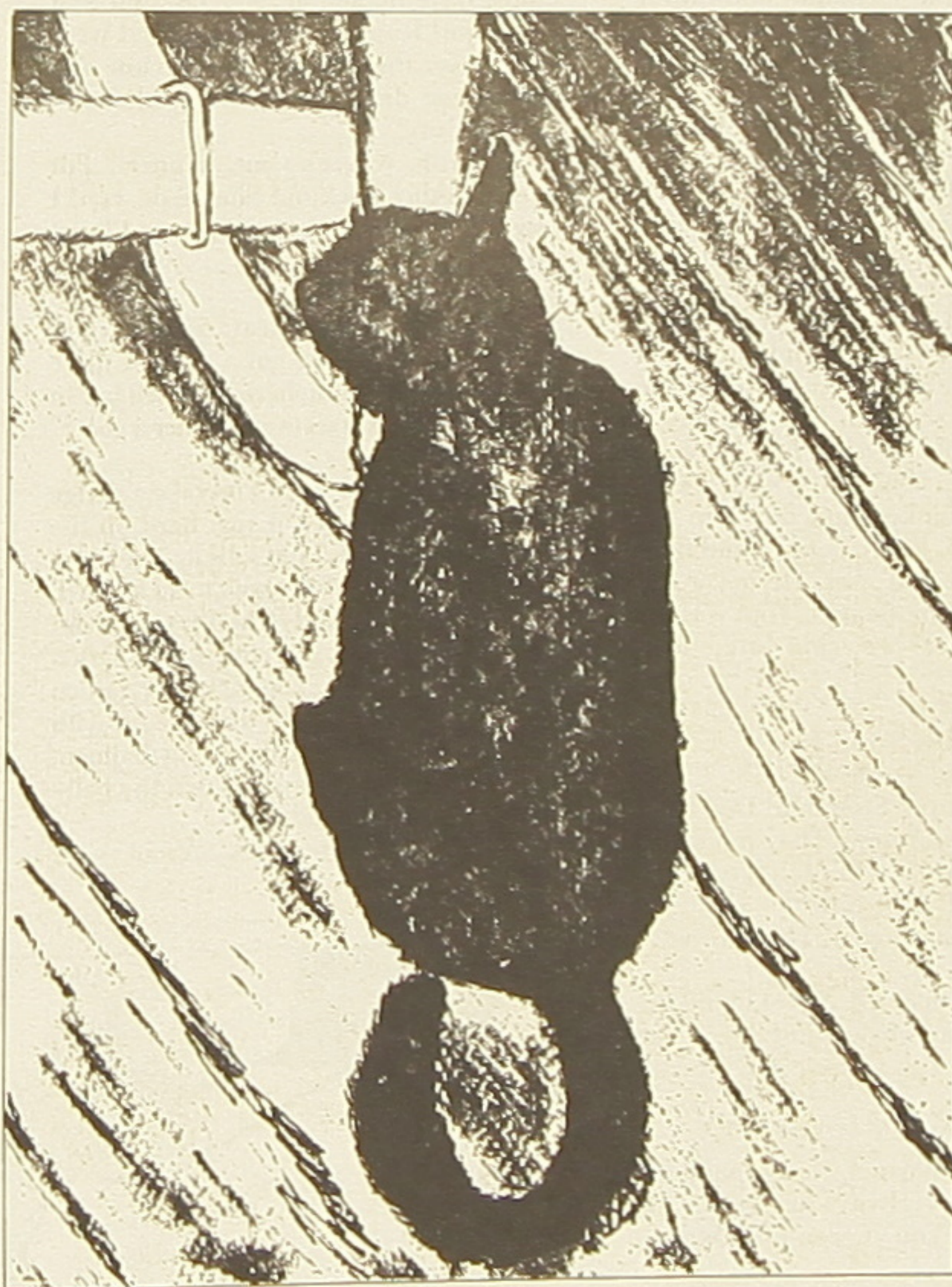
“That man. He is nothin’ but a pest. This mornin’ I was goin’ out to feed the chickens, and I caught him playin’ in the septic tank. I told him he’d better get out or he was gonna get all stinky. But he

doesn’t pay any attention to me. He just ducked down in there and tried to hide. But I could see him peekin’ out. And here you lettin’ him play in your sample bag. I’d figure that a prissy, young thing like you would throw a fit. I guess you can never tell about people.”

“But I don’t see any man. . .”

behind the chicken house.

“Well, this mornin’ he saw me in the lot and he just spread his wings, ruffled his neck feathers ‘till I could see his little pink skin, and he comes a runnin’ at me. I took a swing at him with my purse and just grazed him on the left side. He staggered around ‘til he collected his senses,



“Now, where was I at? Oh, yes. I was tellin’ you about feedin’ the chickens. Well, every mornin’ I put a brick in my little black purse and I carry it with me out to the chicken lot. You see, I have this old Banty rooster name Henry. Mean little dickens. Every mornin’, he comes after me and tries to flog me. I just smack him with my purse. He comes after me a couple of more times and I knock him a rollin’. Pretty soon, he gives up and hides

then he comes at me again. He was a floppin’ his wings and hoppin’ from side to side, and I just hauled off and hit him right square in the head. That’s Henry you smell a boilin’ in the pot right now.”

“Oh, my!”

“That’s the easiest way I ever found to kill a bird. Have you ever killed a chicken before? You haven’t? Well, there are several ways to do it. One way is to grab the chicken by its legs and stretch its neck

out on the choppin' block. Then, you just take a hatchet and chop its little head right off. Yeah, just give it one quick chop.

"If you don't have a hatchet, you can just grab the chicken by its neck and spin it around over your head a couple of times. That old neck will just twist up like a corkscrew and its little head will pop right off.

"Or if you have a little sticking knife, you can hang your bird up by a balin' twine wrapped around its legs. You take your sticking knife and slash the neck right up by the head. Then you quickly stick your knife in its mouth and ram it in its brain. That loosens the feathers and makes it a whole lot easier to pluck the chicken.

"When I was a little girl, my Pa had a mean rooster named Pinky. He was a big, old white Leghorn. That crazy bird would attack anything white. One day, I was walking across the chicken lot, and I had me on a new petticoat with white lace all around the bottom. Old Pinky grabbed hold of that lace and unraveled three yards of it before I could break the thread. I was so mad. So, one day I thought I would teach Pinky how to swim. I snuck up behind that bird, grabbed him, and dunked him down in the waterin' trough. Pinky flopped and flopped. Got me soakin' wet. He never did learn how to swim, though. That was the toughest rooster we ever ate. Real stringy."

"Well, uh, Mrs. . . ."

"It's Miss. Miss Sarah Jones."

"Oh, well, my name is. . ."

"Martin! Martin! Stop that! Don't put those peas up your nose. They might get stuck and then you couldn't breathe! Now, stop that right now!

"Men are such a bother. You married?"

"Uh, yes. I. . ."

"I never was married. Never found the right man. They always just get in the way, anyhow. You've seen how Martin does."

"Well, as a matter of fact, no. I. . ."

"I was never married. Never found the right man. They always just get in the way, anyhow. You've seen how Martin does."

"Well, as a matter of fact, no. I. . ."

"Nope. Never was married. A feller did propose to me once, though. He had the best mule in the county. Douglas was his name. The mule's name, that is. Don't recall the man's name.

"Hold still, you've got a bug on your cheek."

"I've got what? Ow!"

"Heh, heh. Got 'im. Now, where was I? Oh, yes. Douglas was a fine mule. Could pull any load, jump any fence, and

still look right handsome at the church picnic. I thought I would look mighty fine ridin' on that mule, so I said yes, I'd marry what's-his-name.

"Then one night, he's comin' to court me and he was ridin' Douglas by Suicide Hill.

"Now, Suicide Hill is just South of town. Whenever some nut was missin' for a couple of days, the townsmen would just go out and look over Suicide Hill. Nine times out of ten, they'd be there. Gettin' ripe.

"Well, Douglas had this fear of hoot owls. And they say that some big owl must have hooted at Douglas, and that mule just leaped up in the air and went right over the side, what's-his-name and all. Never did get over that mule."

"Oh, my!"

"Martin, where's your manners? Put your clothes back on! Shame on you! I swear! Now you do as I say, or I'll get the whip out."

"The whip?"

You ever eat goat meat? You haven't? I tell you what. I've got a doe out there that's ready for butcherin'. I'll sell her to you real cheap. You ever butcher a goat?"

"No!"

"Well, it's real easy. You take a sledge hammer and smack it real hard on the back of the head. That kills it. Then you cut it right behind the jaws to let it bleed. I like to cut the head right off. Gets it out of the way. Then, you cut a small slit between the hind legs. You stick your garden hose in the slit and fill the hide up with water. It blows up like a big balloon. Then, you just cut a slit down the belly and peel off the hide. . ."

"OK! OK! Now look. About your order. . ."

Oh, yes. We can't forget about that now, can we. But first, could you do a little something for me?"

"What?"

"Carry these peas down into the basement for me. I've got a touch of arthritis in my hip and it just pains me something awful to walk down those steps."

"Okay. Okay. Then we'll do the. . ."

"Just grab the bushel there and follow me. Let's see. I know Martha would want a couple of bottles of shampoo. She scrubs that head of hers all the time. She thinks she has the prettiest hair in the whole place, but to tell the truth, she about rubbed the top of her head bald. She looks just like a monk. Here, let me open the door for you."

"Could you turn on the light? It's so dark I can't see the steps."

"There ain't no light. Just take it slow."

"But I can't see the steps!"

"Here, let me help you."

"HHHEELL!"

"Whoops. Are you okay? Lady? Martin! Martin! I thought I told you to fix these steps! Martin!

"Hey, Lady! Youuu—choooo, Lady. Oh well."

"Martin! Come here and help me shut this door! It's come off its hinges again. Martin! Martin! Where you at? Are you here? Well, good, I'm glad you're gone."



Somewhere in the Forest



By Gary Rhoades

The light autumn drizzle was brief, and now a bright, endless rainbow was gift-wrapping the blue sky. The treetops offered up their own seasonal colors, while black and brown flocks flying high above on the ancient exodus provided another dimension to the afternoon kaleidoscope.

Below, a fox began to trot in an effort to shake off the sleep that still intoxicated him. He had enjoyed a rather deep slumber throughout the night, something the fox had never done before. Taking care of this first son required more energy than evading the most persistent of hounds and apparently was taking its toll on the fox's stamina.

As he speeded his trot, the fox fought off the idea that he was old and sick as other animals would sometimes become. The painful wound on his left side reminded him of the youngster he had fought just the day before. He had sent the invader away as a clear loser.

But why?

Why was he suddenly being forced to protect his home? Ever since he could remember, the other foxes had steered clear of his territory, respecting his superior size, quickness, and cunning. He was still brooding over this when he came to the edge of the forest, bringing a farmhouse and its nearby chicken-pen into view. The pan emitting from the gash in his side begged him to leave, and his old legs asked for another day's rest. There were rabbits that could be his easy prey, but the fox envisioned himself running through the forest with a hen in his mouth and a couple of desperate hounds far behind, never to catch up. He had to find the truth; he began a careful approach to the farmhouse.

"Are you sure you wouldn't have any more of my pancakes?" asked Mrs. Jessiner of Don Anfers.

Anfers winced at the reference to 'her' pancakes. "You cook a great pancake, ma'am, but I've already had five," he patted his stomach. "I'm stuffed."

The small woman, grandmother of fourteen, shook her head. "All this batter gone to waste."

Calvin Jessiner laughed. "Now, May, you know as well as I do that you always make too much batter for breakfast," Jessiner winked at Anfers. "And too many rolls for dinner and too many potatoes for supper."

"How many children did the two of you have?"

"Six boys," answered Jessiner.

"Then that explains your wife's ways."

Jessiner nodded. "And it's a good thing she doesn't try to make me finish all her meals, because it is a hard thing to make your rounds at three hundred pounds."

The three of them laughed at that. Anfers found it hard to imagine the tall, lean farmer carrying three hundred pounds. The farm had been good for both of the Jessiner's.

Jessiner leaned across the table with a sobering message. "You won't get him, Mr. Anfers. The best have been coming here for years and Cap fooled them all. What they say is true; he can't be killed and if he ever was I really don't know what life would be like around here. It's kind of like he's a symbol to the folks around here, specially the older ones, that things can last forever without being too awfully boring."

"Why are you telling me this now?" asked Anfers, suddenly annoyed at Jessiner for suggesting that he, the top-notch hunter from his dogs might fail.

"Because you are being taken advantage of, Mr. Anfers." The farmer looked to his wife who nodded in agreement. "You come down here, pay me room and board, buy all those books from Ed's store about Capricorn, and you're even thinking about renting Delbert Greene's dog because Delbert told you that the dog had more experience with the fox than any other hound had. Cap's going to make me, Ed, and Delbert rich old men, or at least the hunters coming here are."

"Oh, dear!" May Jessiner had been looking through the kitchen window and in the direction of their chicken-pen. "I just saw a fox take off."

Both of the men jumped to their feet. "With a chicken?" asked Jessiner anxiously.

His wife nodded slowly and with regret.

Jessiner knelt to study the prints leading to and from the chickenhouse. "It looks like you're in luck, Mr. Anfers," he said.

"These are Capricorn's prints—the only ones in the country with three toes. Looks like he jumped up on the window."

Anfers had been staring at the three-toed pawprints, entranced by their uniqueness, but Jessiner's last sentence jolted him. He looked up at the window from where the noisy chatter of the chickens could be heard. "The window—it's at least six foot high."

Calvin Jessiner smiled and looked toward the forest. "He's got a headstart on you, Mr. Anfers. You had better get going. I'll check on a couple of things and then head out there to see how you're doing."

The red fox of North America is both a predator and a hunted animal. To eat and keep its hide calls for a constant state of alertness and poise. The average height is 16 inches at the shoulder and the weight is around 15 pounds. Each foot has four toes.

The fox that the locals called Capricorn was the ultimate specimen of its species. His mind was the real steel trap of the forest, and his powerful frame supported 35 pounds. Capricorn's third dimension, however, staked his real claim for legendary status. His unusual three-toed footprints had been tracking the area for over a hundred years, and time after time he had proved reports of his death wrong by appearing soon thereafter.

Calvin Jessiner's closest neighbor, Bill Raker, held the theory that the forest would heal Capricorn's mortal wounds and breathe life back into the fox's body. The only way to kill the fox, according to Raker, was to get the carcass. That had never been done.

As he tried to keep up with his hounds, Don Anfers' heart was pounding tremendously, his body was aching, and with every step he took, an incredible pain shot through his right leg. He would not be able to keep up much longer.

The large red fox still held the limp hen in his mouth as he raced across the wet ground about twenty yards ahead of the two hounds. And that distance was increasing.

Anfers could not believe it.

His dogs had been following the fresh trail for about ten minutes when the first sighting occurred. The temptation to just drink in the animal's magnificence was ignored by the hunter, and the chase began. His dogs were in fantastic shape and had never lost a fox after a sighting. But, now, Capricorn was leaving his dogs behind while carrying a seven pound prize hen in his mouth.

The man with the rifle slowed to a stop and leaned against a tree. The right leg had been broken in four places in a car accident less than two years before, and those familiar shooting pains were more intense than they had ever been.

Catching his breath, Anfers started after his dogs again and he tried to ignore

the pain. His sudden stop was marked by a sharp gasp. The sight of the pointed face and long, bushy tail heading toward him was a shock. Anfers looked past the fox for his dogs. The fox must have circled around, losing the dogs completely. Since the breeze was blowing lightly into Don Anfer's face, Capricorn had not caught the man's scent nor had he spotted him.

The hunter raised his rifle, and at the same time the hunted turned its head to look straight into the rifle's barrel as the shot rang out.

The blow of the bullet knocked Capricorn back; the bullet lodging itself into the shattered top bone of his front left leg. Anfers lowered his rifle and watched in awe as the fox got up, stumbled once, and then limped away. He raised his rifle again, but the fox had disappeared behind some foliage.

Anfers walked carefully past the spot marked with Capricorn's blood, stopped and then peered around the bushes where the fox had gone.

The fox's bolt from the bush startled Anfers, giving the crippled animal its second head start of the day. It would be his last head start, thought Anfers, as he saw the creek that lay across Capricorn's path, with steep banks and torrid waters. Capricorn would try to swim across, an escape tactic that Delbert Greene said the fox uses all the time, giving Anfers the chance for a final shot.

But when Anfers took his second step toward the fox and creek, a hideous sounding snap came from his right leg and he fell heavily to the ground. Then, in a prone position, he raised the rifle and shot once, aimlessly, in the direction of the fox.

Capricorn was near the bank of the creek and was not slowing down. It was evident that broken leg and all, the fox was going to jump the creek.

Cursing his own broken leg, Anfers lined up the fox on his gun sight and fired again just as the fox left his feet. This second bullet hit the animal in midair, turning the body completely around.

Anfers got up on his left knee in time to see the fox crash into the opposite creek bank. The mass of burnished red fur rolled down into the water to be swept away by the perpetual currents.

The hunter watched until the fox's body was out of sight. Although luck has played an important role in the slaying of Capricorn, Anfers longed for the body. He had killed a hundred year-old legend, but there was no proof. Of course, when the area residents found that their chickenhouses were no longer being raided, and Capricorn's prints were no longer spotting the countryside, then everyone would realize that even this legend could not last forever.

As his humbled dogs came into view, Anfers wondered what had become of the chicken.

A young fox emerged from a burrow that was beside a line of briar running along the creek. The fox's mother appeared behind him. She had found the burrow, formerly the home of a badger, and enlarged it so that she could bear her young. Instead of the usual four pups a vixen has in her litter, this mother had only one pup to care for.

Her son was unnaturally large for his age and, of course, he was hungry most of the time. The father had not come to the burrow for an entire day now, and the vixen was suspecting the worse. Since the pup was so mature, she decided to teach him the aspects of hunting earlier than usual.

But there was nothing to be hunted. She had spotted a squirrel and chased it up a tree, out of reach. That has been their only chance for meat, until they came across another fox feasting on the carcass of a tame chicken.

The fox lifted its head and growled a warning, but the vixen's amber eyes turned to a fiery red. The stranger was in her mate's territory, and her son had to be shown what survival was all about. The two opponents were evenly matched, but the vixen made a fatal mistake. She lunged wildly at the carcass, and with lightning speed the other fox quickly clamped its jaws around her small neck. Death came quickly. The pup was alone with the stranger.

The young fox had been confused about his mother's actions. Now, looking at the lifeless body of his mother, he knew something was wrong.

He moved toward the body, and again the other fox growled a warning. The pup failed to heed it.

The older fox struck again, slashing with its teeth. Its young adversary, hesitant at first, suddenly struck back, and the fight that followed was surprisingly one-sided. The orphaned fox, showing extraordinary strength and speed, slashed, bit, and ripped into the older fox's body, forcing it to limp away as the loser.

The victor ate his spoils hungrily. The mother still lay dead at his side, but he had already accepted her death and had avenged it. With the eating finished, the fox drank from the eternal waters of a nearby spring and then headed back to the burrow.

The fox grew larger in the following weeks, although his only meals were of insects. A long stretch of days had passed without actual meat, when he discovered a farmhouse near the edge of the forest. His keen and unforgetful nose picked up the scent of chickens.

The fox had not yet encountered man; he had never ventured out of the forest.

Trotting to the chickenhouse, he spotted the high, yet open, window. The fox looked to the house once and then jumped through the window.

The large number of birds and the noise they created upon his entrance did not rattle the fox. He landed on all fours, calmly picked out the nearest hen, killed it, and jumped back out with the prize in his mouth.

The fox made it to the forest easily. "It can't be Capricorn," said Anfers. "I killed the real Capricorn."

The hunter listened as Calvin Jessiner chuckled over the phone. "Tell me, Mr. Anfers, how many three-toed foxes do you know of that can jump up on the window sill of my chickenhouse? Don't worry about it—he's done it to the best. How's the leg?"

The image of the fox crashing into the creek bank had retained its vivid details in the mind of Don Anfers, whose leg was in a large fiberglass cast.

"I'll be back down there next week," he said.

The fresh prints at Bill Raker's farm confirmed that, somehow, Capricorn, the most incredible animal that Anfers had ever seen, had survived.

Anfers, on wooden crutches, finally nodded his head after staring at the ground for what seemed like eternity to Jessiner and Raker.

"What do you think, Don?" asked Jessiner. "He's something else, ain't he?"

"There are no words for him," replied the hunter. He looked at the two farmers. "I want to thank you for everything and I'll let you be the first to know that me and my dogs are retiring from the hunt. They haven't been the same since they lost Capricorn. And I haven't been the same. I actually regret shooting him."

"Just remember," said Jessiner. "He's done it to the best."

The best continued to come down to that forest to hunt Capricorn, and the fox continued to outrun and outwit them all. Don Anfers returned to the area eight years later after reading a story in the newspaper that the legendary fox had finally been killed, and a pond was being searched for his body. There had been four hunters on hand who swore that Capricorn, with at least three bullets in his body, had dived into the pond, never to resurface.

Anfers was at the pond on the fourth day of the search. The man in charge was skeptical. "The pond is just too deep and too muddy," he told Anfers. "It's just too much trouble for a fox, even if it is Capricorn."

Anfers turned away smiling. "He's done it again, hasn't he," he said to himself. He made mental plans to bring some dogs down to the area in hopes of merely seeing Capricorn again. The rifle would be left at home.

Somewhere in the forest, a young fox emerged alone from his burrow. He had not seen his father for several days now, and at the moment his mother was

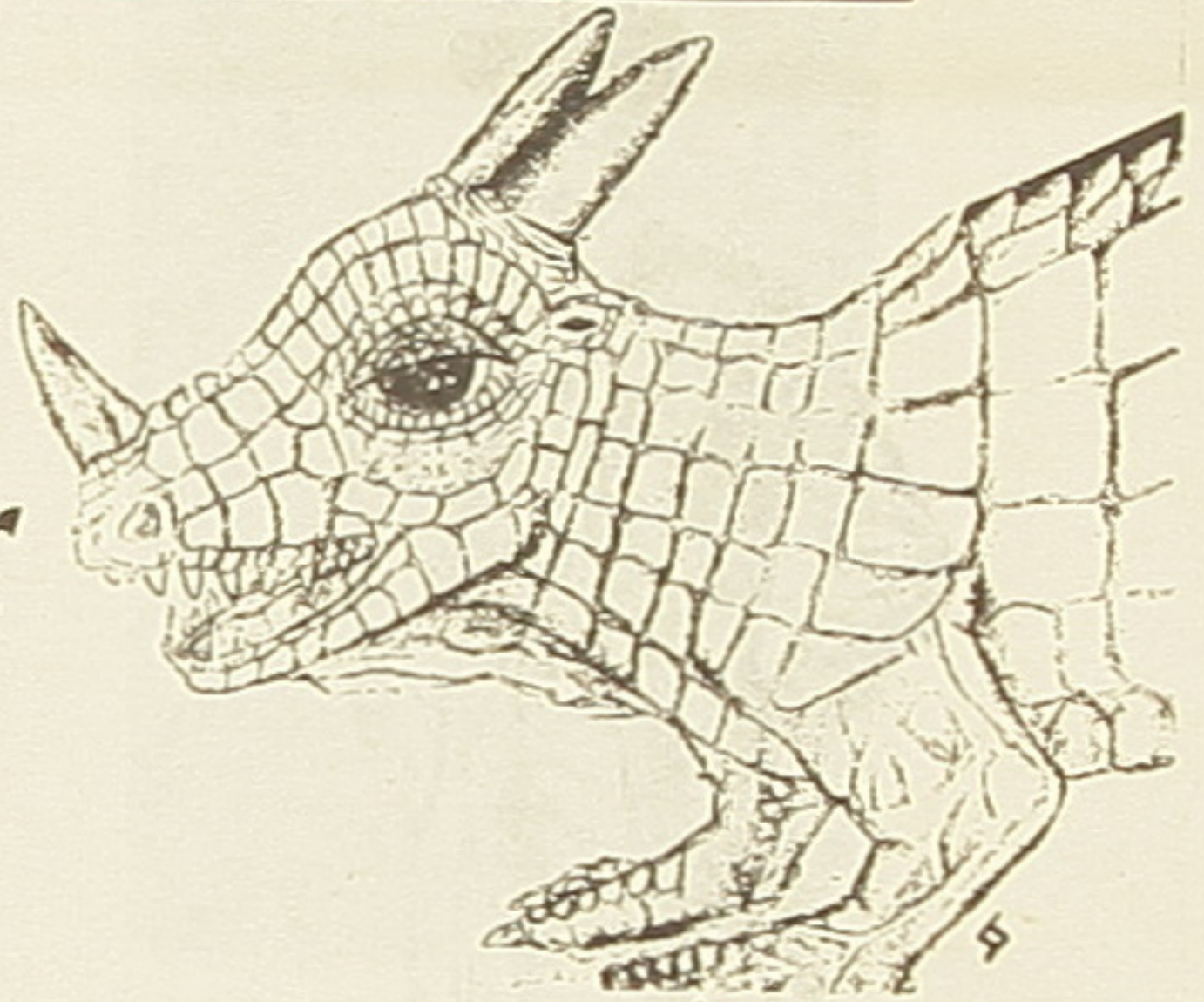
elsewhere, hunting for food.

After getting a breath of fresh air, the fox crawled back into the burrow, leaving behind footprints with three toes.



The Shower Monster

By Jeanette Bradfield



From the moment he awoke that morning, Denny made his parents regret ever having children.

Pete and Shirley were jerked out of a peaceful sleep by his resounding screams. Shirl rose groggily and went to pick him up.

"Good morning, Pete thought wryly. What a fantastic way to start the day. He winced as Denny hit a particularly shrill note, and resisted the impulse to put a pillow over his head.

Shirl carried Denny in. "I can't get him to shut up," she fretted. "He keeps yelling about the shower monster."

Pete listened more carefully to his son's cries. True enough, he cried constantly about the "the shower monster."

Shirl, never too even-tempered in the best of circumstances, felt a surge of irritation, mostly directed toward Pete. "I told you that *The Three Little Pigs* would probably give him nightmares," she snapped.

"I can see a really close relationship between a wolf that huffs and puffs and a shower monster," Pete protested.

"Wolves, monsters, it's all the same to an impressionable two-year old. Now your son will probably have nightmares for two weeks because of that stupid story," she paused, and then directed her next words to Denny. "Denny, you know there's no such thing as a shower monster. It was just a dream. Besides, your daddy doesn't allow them there, anyway."

Denny refused to budge from his notion, that not only did shower monsters exist in the world, one had taken up residence in the Cooper family shower while the foolish adults slept.

Shirl came to quick decision. She would show Denny that there wasn't a monster in their shower, and maybe that would

quiet him down a little bit. It might even keep him from dreaming about the "shower monster" again.

"Denny, mommy will show you there's no monsters in our shower. We'll go up and look right now."

Denny did not like this idea. No sirree, not one bit. If they went up and looked, that would give the monster a chance. . . a chance TO EAT THEM!

Shirl's resolve to go look was only strengthened by this terrible thought. She got a tight hold of her unruly little boy and walked out of the bedroom. "Come running if you hear me scream," she told Pete jokingly.

Pete watched them leave the room and proceed up the stairs. He could faintly hear Shirl's voice as she continued to talk comfortingly to Denny. The squeaking sound the bathroom door made as it opened (Shirl had told him to oil it a hundred times, but somehow he just kept forgetting.)

And then silence.

He should be hearing Shirl telling Denny that everything was all right, nothing to worry about. . . but he heard nothing. He felt tense, and tried to relax. You're catching some of Denny's nightmares, Petey, old boy, he told himself. No sweat, everything's totally cool. . .

"Pete, could you please come up here?" Shirl wasn't screaming, but she didn't sound totally cool, either. He ran up the stairs. Cautiously entered the bathroom.

And saw it.

Not a shower monster. A sink monster, if it were any sort of monster at all. It was a small animal, about the size of a cat, with a coat of black fur and big red eyes. Neither Pete nor Shirl had ever seen

anything like it in their lives. It crouched in their bathroom sink, and growled at them if they got too close.

Strangely enough, Denny seemed to have forgotten his fear of the "shower monster" entirely, and Shirl had to keep a tight hold of him to prevent him from petting the "kit-cat." It was apparently just a baby, despite the mouthful of small and sharp-looking teeth it possessed. Pete was a little bit excited about finding the animal. God knew what it was; it might be valuable or rare. He decided to go downstairs and try to get hold of a vet or zoo, something that could someone who could tell them what to do with the animal in their sink. In their sink, for heavens sake! He could see headlines now.

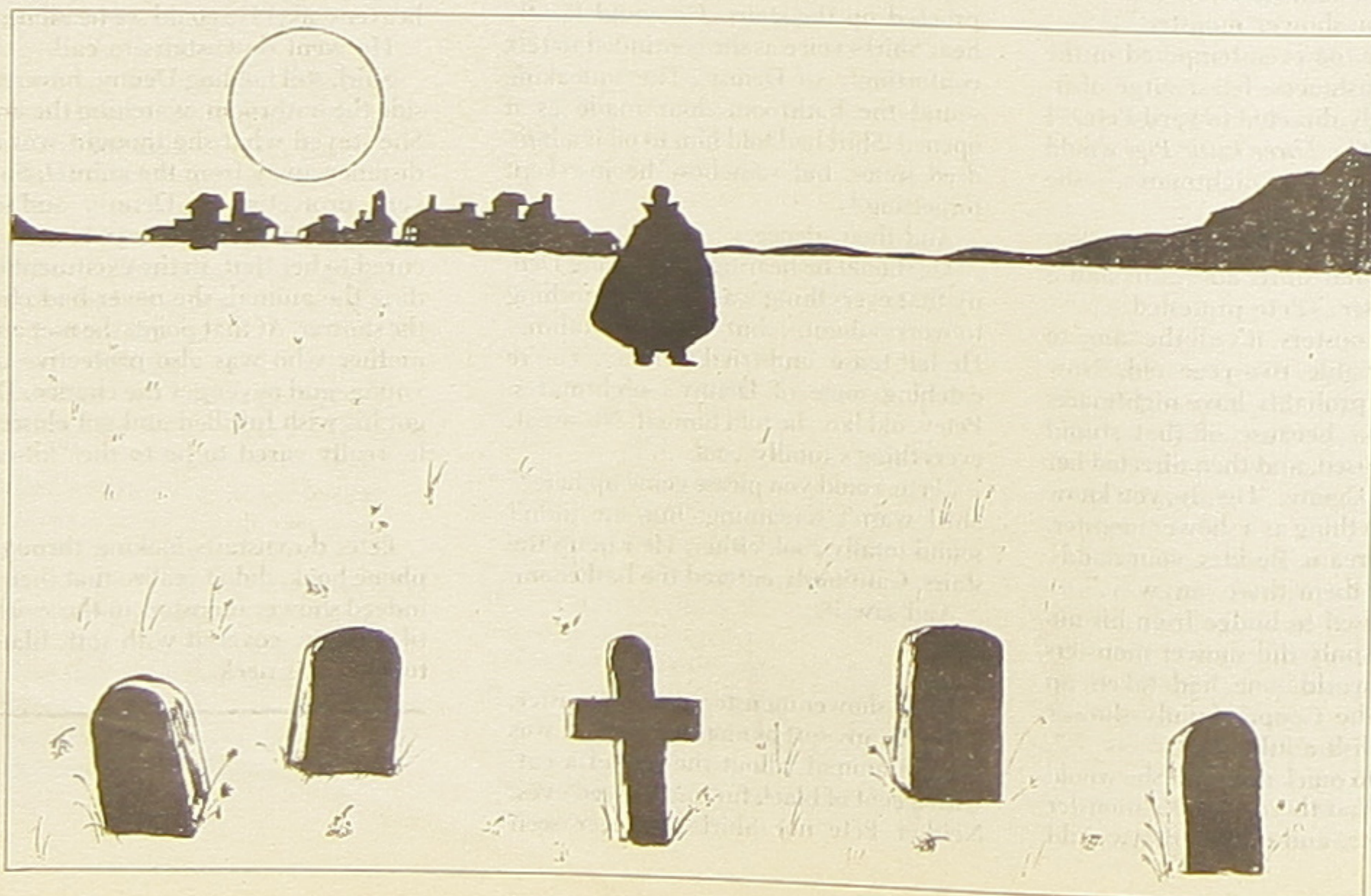
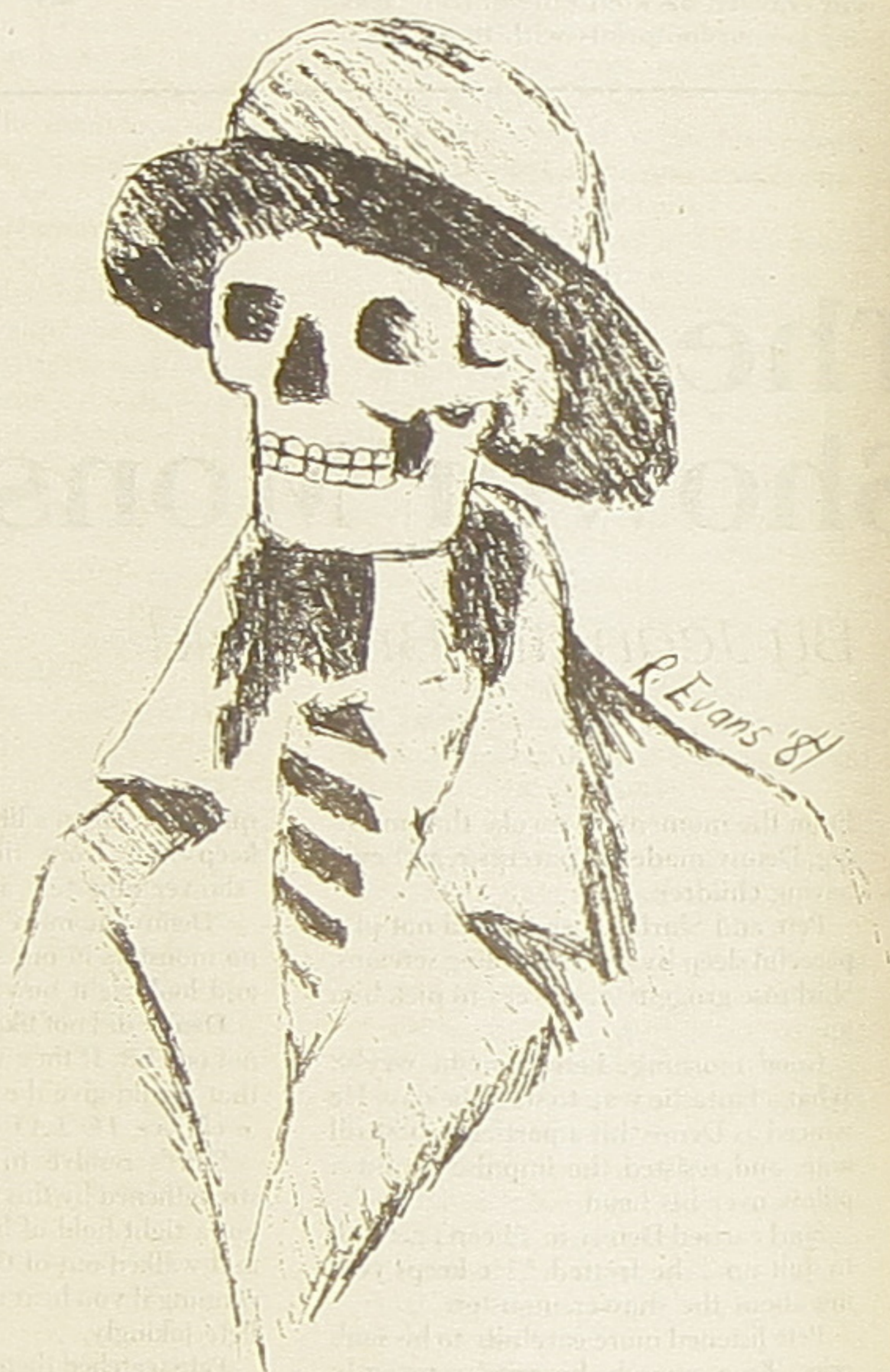
He went downstairs to call.

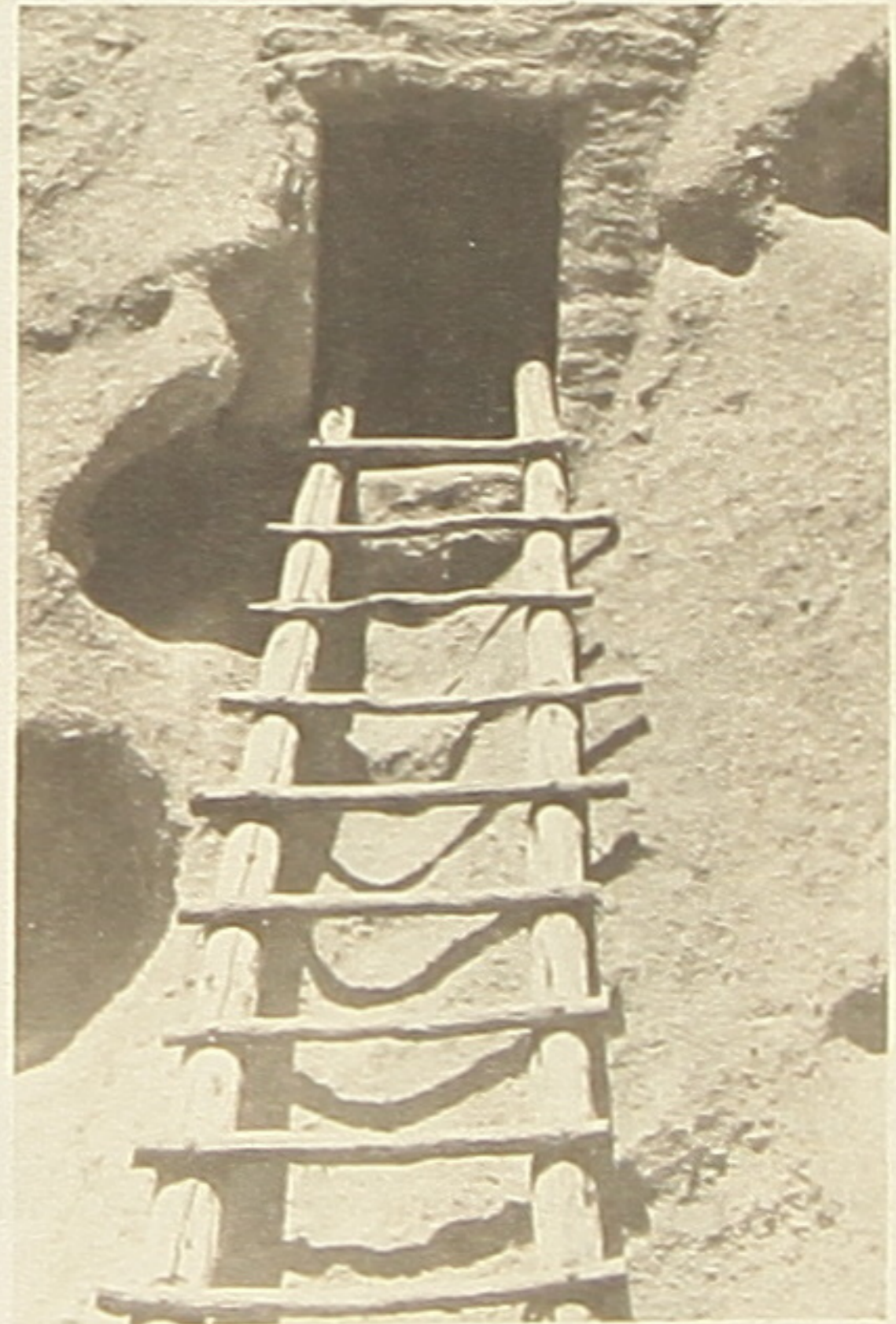
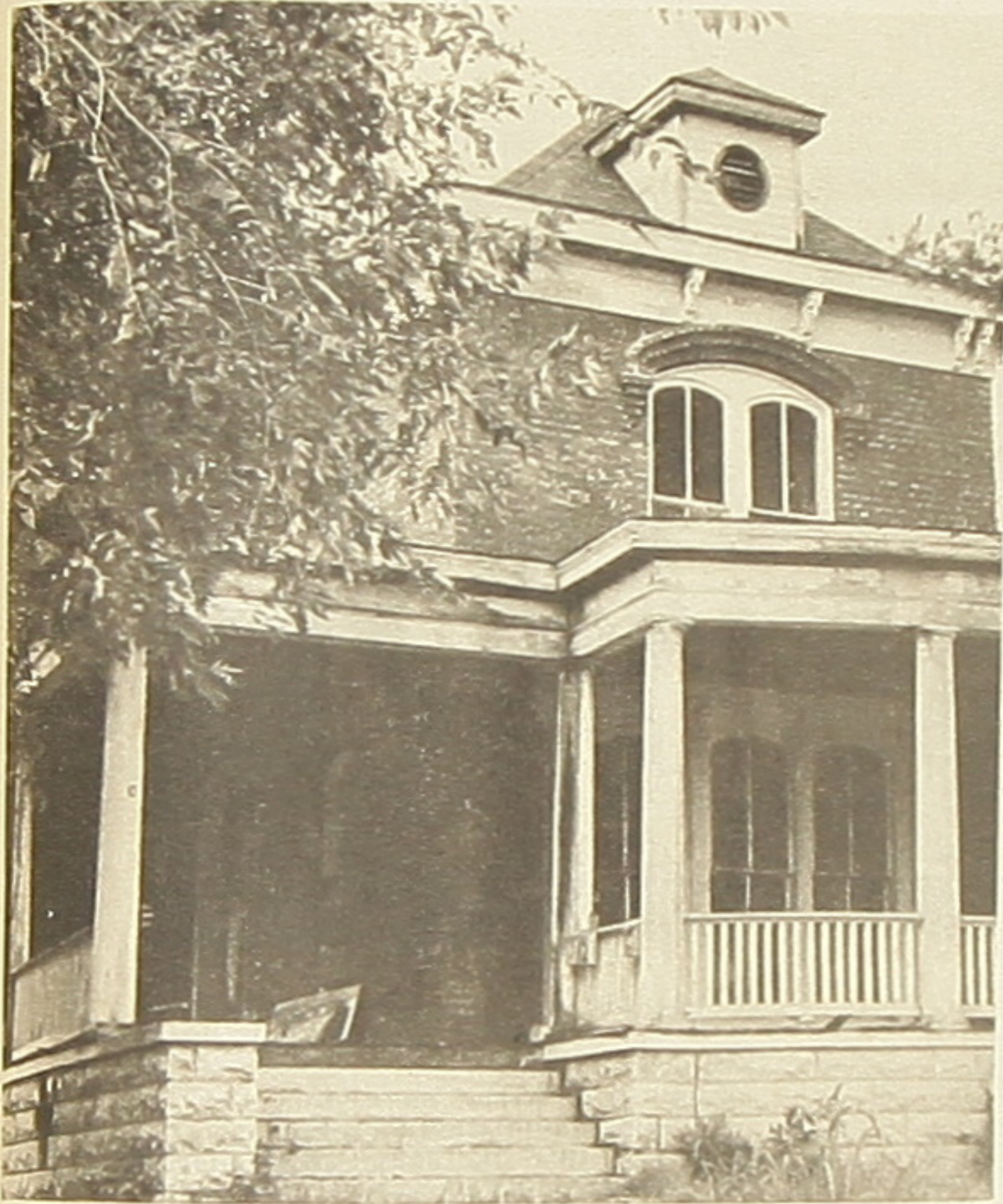
Shirl, still holding Denny, hovered outside the bathroom, watching the animal. She stayed what she thought was a safe distance away from the animal. She was very protective of Denny, and didn't want to place him in any danger. It occurred to her that, in the excitement of finding the animal, she never had checked the shower. At that point, she met another mother who was also protective of her young, and never got the chance. Denny got his wish fulfilled and got closer than he really cared to be to the "kit-cat."

Pete, downstairs looking through the phone book, didn't realize that their were indeed shower monsters in the world until the paw covered with soft, black fur touched his neck.



2004 CUBERT
2004





Photos by JoAnn Hollis
and Rick Evans



Girl in the Burgundy Hat

Had I said with my heart, *I love you*
 was there a chance you might have stayed?
 But I couldn't you see, Sister Cindy,
 because of the big parade. The cold, moist air of autumn
 ruined our parade, and your invectives
 and scorn for our dreams were worse—
 worse than the cold and the rain.
 You moved to the beat of your courage
 (unbothered by the rain) to the beat
 of your brazen courage, your courage
 and your delicate pain!
 But you're gone like the cheers
 and the hoopla,
 never to come again.

Sometimes when leaves are falling
 (the banners will fade again too)
 old friends of the heart come calling
 and I remember you.
 And I remember Jed, the preacher,
 dressed in his cheerless black,
 (a sobering, funeral black)
 but most, I remember you Cindy,
 in your jaunty, burgundy hat;
 in your (God forbid that I say fashionable) charming,
 burgundy hat, like a specter, a sixties' flower child,
 become hawk
 in a burgundy hat

when now I revel in colors
 on a halcyon autumn day
 and the rah—rahs are gone from the Oval
 I ponder the dream and the way.
 And you, how has it gone in the cities,
 with the message and cross you bear?
 And your courage, it seems absolute,
 how did your courage wear?
 And Jed (I recall he was older), your child, and your entourage,
 how did your mission fare?

As I skirted the crowd, I saw her,
 the girl in the burgundy hat.
 She moved rhythmically and preached Jesus.

and against lust and learning and sin
 (someone called her *sister*) and about
 being born again.

Today brings a cool, clear sky
 with hints of an early fall. . . But
 she's gone, like the banners of homecoming
 like the cheers for the queen—hurrah!
 like the cheers for the game—rah, rah!

As I shirt the crowds by the Union,
 I picture you there by bell. The students
 still love and despise you, like they love
 and despise themselves. And as
 your voice shreds the damp air again,
 and your judgements volley around,
 your team of young disciples
 surveys the circling crowd,
 to rally the circling crowd.
 Transfixed and silent they hail you, and
 it's *Sister Cindy for Queen!*
 hail, you, deliverer, queen
 delivered-from-the-discos-queen!
 But your dictums are mocked and echoed
 —hurrahs at the victory scene!

Then I turn to books for learning,
 to the crowds, and to my friends.
 We chat in the halls of Southern
 about concerts and sports. Amen! Say Amen!
 Hail our evangel, amen! But
 sometimes in mid-october,
 (though we had to ask you to go)
 when the Fall Fiesta is over,
 (it wasn't from the heart, you know)
 It's then, Sister Cindy, I miss you.
 But, I never let it show.
 I cross or circle the Oval
 (it still gets damp and cold)
 to the beat and the hum of the traffic
 (The only beat is the traffic)
 that hums along Newman road.
 It's then, suddenly like a septic,
 or the flash of a swift baton,
 your hat marks accents on the air,
 for a moment there! there!
 and gone!

Vernon L. Peterson

The Worm

"Yea, though I walk
through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art. . ."

watching the worm
squirming
at the edge of the grave
his very presence
deafening my ears
to the preacher's chant

his pale transparent flesh
sharply contrasting
with the stiff dark mourners

armless legless
mocking the helpless ones
in grief.

no sigh no tear
the slithering worm
twisting in his delightful
farewell
disappearing
into the deep darkness

"Ashes to ashes
dust to dust. . ."

worm to worm

—Susan Stone

Off Your Rocker

I think you're off your rocker
totally insane
not dealing with a full deck
While trying to play the game.

Nutzo, bonkers, gonzo!
perhaps you've flipped your lid.
You must have popped your cork
to do the things you did.

Nuttier than a fruitcake.
You wallow in oblivion
with toys in your attic
you've shown to nearly everyone.

Looking for your marbles,
somewhere in the twilight zone.
Holding conversation,
while sitting all alone.

—Curtis Steere



The Alternative

Ignorance and poverty breed,
positive advancement or backward skid,
pass on the problem like the aged and dead did.
round and round like
Ideologies handed down,
destruction's near
The alternative of life,
God or fate, is clear: that. . .

sensitive ego or precious pride,
men are never perfect:
change or face mass homicide.

—Ray Stanley

Wind

Soaring up through the hot summer wind,
And dodging the grass blades at ground level,
The insect becomes airborne.

Meeting the wind's gust,
It fights.
Wings tottering,
It fights so hard.
And then,
On the brink of fatality,
It changes direction
Carried by the wind.

—Craig Ball



The Spider Web

walking through the spider web
the fine sticky threads
tickling
like the spider's legs themselves

wiping my face
rubbing groping hands
across my body
for the invisible strings
trying to shed
the web
clinging
like the ghostly fingers
of a delicate child

—Susan Stone

EXCUSE ME!

Of Course It's Silly,
Do Pardon My Asking,
I'm Sure It's Nothing—
Just Some Morbid Fascination;
A Psychological Imprint Left Over From Childhood.
But My Curiosity Is Piqued
So Please Indulge Me. . .

. . . was it you I saw last night howling at the moon?

—"A Student"

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